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Chapter 1: Chapter 1

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Rory Williams wasn't really sure what he thought he was going to do. He didn't know where he was, or if he would ever be able to get back out again, or if he'd made a mistake in going in in the first place.

Running as fast as he could after the woman who had pleaded so desperately for his help that he hadn't really even had time to *think* of what he was doing following her into the strange and *obviously alien* blue box that had smashed through the walls of his hospital's lounge room, Rory wondered if he would very soon start to regret that decision.

As though sensing his growing apprehension, the woman turned around, her amber eyes that seemed to glow from within shining with fear and worry and that same pleading, *begging* look that had compelled him

to ignore the shouting of his companions and rush headlong into the waiting doors of the smoking and spark-tossing blue box.

She didn't say a word—she hadn't spoken the first time either—but she didn't have to. Her meaning was as clear as day.

Help me.

How could he ever refuse a plea for help?

That was why he'd become a nurse. He wasn't cut out to be a doctor, he knew that, but at least he could do this.

"I will," he said, "But you have to tell me what's wrong."

He needed to know if he was going to be able to help, if he could do this, or if he should turn around and run back the way he'd came right at that moment, to find someone who *could* help. If there was someone in here, and they were alien, and they were *hurt*, then he couldn't be wasting time trying to do things he wasn't able to. There was no time to lose. Who knew what sort of biology they would have? What if they were nothing like humans? What if they had waving tentacles and wings and internal organs that humans had never even heard of? What if he tried to help, and did nothing but make the situation worse?

A chunk of wall—pale cream and dotted with tiny hollows and rough but almost soft to the touch—appeared suddenly in front of him out of nowhere, cutting off his sight of the woman with the golden eyes as it crashed to the ground.

Flames leapt into the air and sparks jumped in an explosion of heat and sound, and Rory found himself suddenly surrounded by a world of fire and sparks and wires and coral and confusion as acrid smoke choked his lungs and *something* shifted in the air and *the next thing he knew* he was standing *in front* of the fallen pillar, and the woman stood in front of him, her eyes as pleading as ever.

Before he even had a chance to understand what had happened—he'd *moved*, except, he *hadn't*—his hand had been captured in hers, and though sparks and smoke clogged the air, he still somehow managed, with perfect clarity, to hear her voice when she said, "*Please*, please you must save my son!" Tears shone at the back of her eyes. And then they were running again, and she was pulling him along by the hand, and even in the smoke and the fog and the sparks she seemed to know exactly where she was going, and steered him past hazards before they even happened.

The world had gone *strange*, because Rory somehow knew that they were moving...slowly. Somehow, he knew that the world outside of them was speeding by like a train, minutes ticking by for every step he took.

Even as the woman who was so desperate for him to help her, help her *son* pulled him farther into the dying ship, his heart doubted him, and the fear that *maybe he wouldn't even be able to help* almost drove him to his knees.

He was Rory Williams. He was a nurse. He wasn't a doctor, or a scientist, or a genius. He'd never even met an alien before. He hadn't been there when the

Adipose had started forming from excess fat. He hadn't been watching the telly when an alien ship crash-landed in London, and he hadn't watched as its unconscious pilot was pulled out of the river Thames.

The only alien contact he'd had was when he had been driven to the rooftops when he was sixteen with the rest of the people who had A-positive blood running through their veins. A voice like silken light had whispered through his head, assuring him that everything was going to be okay, if only he followed the others, like a good little servant, upstairs, out the hallway window, and down onto the roof. The voice whispered for him to climb higher, even as some inner, primal part of him struggled against the fog in his mind, and he'd looked with dazed eyes up at the window the the attic a foot over his head, and with strength he hadn't even known he'd possessed, he jumped up, his fingers curling over the edge, and pulled himself up and onto the topmost roof of his family's house. Looking out across the sky, he'd been able to see other families gathered on the highest points they could reach. Mothers and daughters and sons perched on the edge, brothers and sisters...almost every house had at least two people standing on the edge, waiting for the order to jump. But he was alone.

The wind blasted him with freezing needles of cold, and goosebumps crawled along the exposed skin of his arms, and beneath his shirt. He shivered, even as his mind was lost to the shadow vale of the voice whispering in his ear.

From the lower roof, from the window he'd climbed out, his sister's voice called, terrified and confused. "Rory? Rory, *where are you?* Come back inside, *please!*" His ears had caught the sound of feet on the roof, and then her voice was closer, more terrified than before, "Rory!"

But Alice couldn't reach for the attic window, couldn't pull herself up any farther than she already was. She had always been afraid of heights, and he could picture her, pressed against the wall, her hands reaching uselessly for the next window, because as afraid as she was of falling, she feared for him *more*. "Rory, I'm coming up to get you, okay?" Her voice had called out to him as if from a thousand miles away, faded and distant in the fog in his head, "Just don't move!"

But she never made it to the roof he stood on. Even if she'd jumped, she wouldn't have been able to reach the window. She wouldn't be able to pull herself up.

He'd stood there, arms outstretched at his sides, hollow voice whispering in his ear, wind buffeting the warmth from his body, and his sister's terrified voice calling out to him, trying to assure him that everything was going to be alright, for longer than he could count. Maybe only a few minutes had passed. Maybe it had been days.

He'd been terrified of heights ever since.

That fear came rushing back to him with a vengeance when the woman stopped suddenly, throwing her arms out to block the way, her breath turning into a

frightened gasp.

His eyes burning with smoke and hardly able to breathe, it took him a few, confused seconds to realize that the woman had stopped them at the end of a corridor, and that the tips of her shoes were hanging out over the edge of jagged metal and pitch black darkness. The other side of the gap was shrouded by the thick smoke that filled the air.

Barely a foot wide, a metal pillar that seemed to have fallen toward them spanned the gap, the end of it popped up on the floor by his feet, and the rest of it disappeared into the smoke only a few feet from where they were standing.

Fear slamming into him like a kick to the stomach, Rory stumbled back, colliding with a wall. *No, no, no, no, no, no, no!* "Oh my god," He whispered, clutching at his heart through the fabric of his scrubs, and feeling it pounding against his ribcage like it wanted to break free of his chest, "Oh god, no, we—" His wide eyes locked onto the back of the woman's head, where she was still standing at the edge, her knuckles white against the metal frame of the door that had once been there, her arms trembling, "I'm sorry, we, *we can't go that way!*" He said, desperately pushing himself farther into the wall, knowing that if he even *tried* to go near the edge, all he would be able to think about was *almost falling off the roof of his house, and waiting for hours to be rescued even after the voice released him, because their parents hadn't been home, and Alice couldn't get onto the roof to help him, and he couldn't get back down the way he'd*

come, and he was terrified and scared, and the police had been affected too, and it wasn't until Melody managed to get away from her own panicked family and saw him from the road behind his house and climbed up after him that his terror started to calm. She had called Amy, and Amy had called her aunt, and her aunt had called her friend, and then, finally, rescue came in the form of a cherry picker that lowered he and his friend off the roof and safely onto the ground.

Gasping away from the sudden assault on his mind, Rory found his eyes stinging with tears that were both from the smoke, and from the fear that had risen up in his heart to strangle him. He didn't know how, and he didn't know why, but he *knew* that the woman had just *looked into his mind*. He couldn't explain it. He just

Almost immediately, fear and anger surged through him, and his hands fisted at his sides, "*Don't do that!*" He snapped, taking another step away from the edge and the woman who still stood there, her head bent, her arms braced against the walls, her body almost glowing in front of the smoke across the gap, the edges of her hair almost like a golden halo, "If—if you want to know something, just *ask* me! You—you can't just go digging around in my mind like that! Like—"

Like the voice that had told him to climb onto the roof of his house and jump.

Like the voice that controlled one third of Earth's population. Like the voice that controlled all the A-positive people on the planet. Like the voice that had

made him realize that he was the only one in his family of four to have A-positive blood.

Looking back now, after all his years of training to be a nurse, the answer was as obvious as the sun rising and setting every day. It would have been possible, had his mother been AB-positive. His father was O positive. The only thing he could pass on was O-type blood. It would have been entirely possible for his sister to then be B-positive, and he A-positive, since both could be passed on.

But his mother didn't have AB-positive blood. She was type B.

There was literally no way for him to have inherited his A-positive blood from his parents.

The day he was forced onto the roof by a voice whispering in his head was the day that he realized that he realized that it was impossible for him to have been his parents' son, and somehow, that was almost worse than the phobia of heights he'd gained that day.

The woman was still standing in the doorway, facing away from him, tensed. He fought back against the voice inside his head that told him it wasn't that big of a deal, he could probably make it across the walkway if he tried. *Sit down*, the voice told him, *and scoot across. Lower your center of gravity.*

But just *thinking* about it made him dizzy, and his hands clenched and unclenched at his sides spasmodically. "I'm sorry," He repeated, trying to make the woman understand, "We, we *can't* go that way. I won't be able to get across. I won't be able to

help your son." His anxiety was ratcheting up a notch again. This woman—she had to be alien, the way her eyes almost glowed, the way she could *read his mind and look through his memories*—no matter how human she looked—she had asked him for help, and he intended to give it.

He could forgive her for looking through his mind. This was an emergency, and he had no way of knowing if that were normal behavior for her kind or not. Maybe it was her way of communicating.

"*Please*," He said, taking a few steps toward her, one hand pressed firmly into the wall, his eyes locked onto the back of her head so he wouldn't have to see the drop in front of her, "We have to find another way around!"

At last, she turned. Her arms dropped to her sides. Her eyes were still flickering softly with golden light, but her expression had fallen into one of despair. She shook her head, strands of gold swishing through the smoke-clogged air.

There is no other way.

Her brow had lowered over her desperate eyes, and her mouth opened slightly. She lifted one hand, and beckoned him forward, her face screaming her desperate fear. Please. *Please!*

And Rory Williams was faced with a choice. Go forward, against his fear, and try to get across the walkway that would lead further into the impossible ship, and hope he could help the alien person injured further inside? The woman's *son*? Or turn around, and

run back through as fast as he could, and find someone that knew what they were doing? Someone that had more experience dealing with aliens than just being convinced to climb onto the roof of your house and making you realize you were adopted.

He wasn't cut out for this. He was a *nurse* for Pete's sake! How was he supposed to know what to do when he finally met the alien he'd ran in here after the woman to help? What if it looked nothing like her, what if it didn't look human? What if it *looked* human, but was completely different on the inside? What if it had internal bleeding? What if it didn't even have *blood*? How was *he* supposed to help?

His feet started to turn. His legs prepared for him to run. He wouldn't be able to get across that walkway. He was useless to the person hurt on the other side. All he was doing by hesitating was wasting precious time that couldn't afford to be wasted.

His mouth opened to form words of apology, of assurance, because he was going to go get someone else who could help—but then the woman *moved*, and in between one moment and the next, she was right in front of him, and her hands were on his shoulders—gently, not threateningly, gently, with just enough pressure to make him look at her—and her golden and hazel brown eyes were staring directly into his, and he couldn't bring himself to turn away.

Trust me. She seemed to say, in an impossible voice as silent and loud as the stars, *Trust me, please.* And behind her eyes there seemed to glow something more than sorrow, more than fear, and worry. It was

belief. It was trust in him, even as she asked him to trust her.

Rory swallowed nervously, and his gaze darted to the doorway that led to an abyss, and the fallen pillar that was the only way across. The woman pulled away from him, and moved to the doorway.

In an instant, in a *blink*, in the waver of a fading signal, she disappeared.

Somehow, Rory knew, that if he didn't go *right that second*, he would never be able to cross the bridge. He knew, somehow, that the woman hadn't been real. Not *really*. She was a projection. She'd been created by the ship to lead him to her injured pilot. Somehow, he knew, in his heart, that the ship was going to help him cross the gap, but he had to do it *now*, while it still had the *strength*!

His feet pushed against the floor, and in a moment, he was running. The smoke cleared out of his way as though pulled by an unseen fan, and even as part of his mind tried to stop him from moving closer to the walkway, he knew that he would make it.

He leapt up and onto the pillar. His feet moved on their own, the air around him seemed to twitch and move, pressing against him as he ran and nudging him closer to the center when his feet slipped toward the edge.

His heart pounded in his chest, and time seemed to have slowed. His shoes impacted with the pillar—dark blue grey, almost stone-like—with every breath, launching him through the void and farther into the

ship that was bigger on the inside.

He wasn't sure how far he ran. It might have been a few feet. It might have been fifty. For all he knew, it had been a hundred. It didn't matter. The next thing he knew, he was free of the gap, and the comforting walls of a hallway had fallen into place around him again.

Then his feet slammed into the metal of the floor beneath him, and the smoke had cleared from his eyes entirely, and there was a light up ahead, and he could *finally* see the hallway—metaled with dark orange and black octagons of broken lights, arches of a pale cream *something* that almost looked like coral—and there was a light up ahead, and then the woman reappeared.

She was ahead of him in the corridor, running, the blue of her leather jacket shining gold in the warmth of the lights that still functioned, casting the hallway in a brown-ish hue, her hair moving like ghosts through the air, her feet moving silently across the floor.

But still, somehow, he could hear her. He could hear the beat of her shoes against the floor. He could hear the panting of her breath. He could hear her voice, calling out to him, *This way, this way!*

And he followed. Through the dark and dusty light, he followed her, still afraid that he wouldn't be able to help, still afraid that he would prove to be useless, his mind still in *shock* that he'd made it across the fallen pillar without falling, without getting dizzy, without

freaking out. He ran after her, the woman, the ship, whose name he didn't know, and when the lights failed and sputtered out, he was still running, determined that he would do his best to help the alien child that waited beyond.